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C O N F I D E N T I A L CHISINAU 000142

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STATE FOR EUR/UMB

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [RU](#) [MD](#)
SUBJECT: SOVA DESCRIBES LAVROV'S VISIT TO CHISINAU

Classified by: Charge d'Affaires Kelly A. Keiderling for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a February 25 meeting, Minister for Reintegration Sovu briefed Ambassador on the outcomes of Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's February 23-24 visit to Chisinau. He said that Lavrov's visit had taken place in a positive, calm atmosphere, with no difficult issues pressed. Sovu said that, though no decision had been finalized, there were good chances that a 2-plus-1 meeting would happen in March. If that meeting did take place, the Moldovans would insist upon clearly stating that a final settlement could be reached only in the 5-plus-2 format. If the Russians insisted upon a formal press statement, then Sovu promised he would consult with 5-plus-2 partners before such a statement was released. Sovu said Moldova was looking to U.S.-Russia talks in the CFE context to resolve the question of withdrawing Russian forces. Sovu said he believed there was a real possibility of achieving a settlement with Smirnov. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The February 23-24 visit of Serghei Lavrov to Chisinau was the first time a Russian Foreign Minister has visited Moldova since 2001. His visit included a meeting with Prime Minister Greceanii, with Acting Foreign Minister Ostalep, attendance at a Russian Military Day reception at the Russian Embassy, inauguration of a new Russian Cultural Center building, and a one-on-one with President Voronin that lasted approximately one hour. Though Minister for Reintegration Vasile Sovu briefed Ambassador on this visit, Sovu himself was only partially informed about the high-level one-on-one, and expected to learn more directly from the President in the coming days.

March 2-plus-1 Likely, but Not Yet Set

¶3. (C) Though the majority of press reports announced that the visit resulted in a decision to hold a 2-plus-1 meeting in March, Sovu explained that the question of whether on not such a trilateral meeting would take place was still open. However, he said it was more likely than not that such a 2-plus-1 meeting would take place. For now, consultations were still needed to establish whether such a meeting would have positive results for both sides of the river. If the GOM determined that a meeting would not have positive results, it would inform Moscow, via its Embassy, that there was no reason to meet. Though press reports reference dates between March 5 and March 15, Sovu insisted that it was still too early to state any firm date, though this time frame could not be excluded.

¶4. (C) Sovu noted that there had been rumors (spread by the Ukrainians) that Lavrov would bring to Chisinau some kind of document to be signed at the 2-plus-1 meeting, but insisted that Lavrov had not brought anything of the kind. Though in previous meetings Sovu had consistently rejected the idea of Moldova signing any document at a 2-plus-1, he now conceded that such a meeting might well be followed by a press statement. Moldova would want the statement to cover three main points -- the need for a peaceful settlement, recognition of the territorial integrity of Moldova, and settlement only within the 5-plus-2 context. Sovu assured the Ambassador that if the Russians presented Moldovan officials with an accord to sign,

the GOM would reject it, insisting upon the 5-plus-2 format. A 5-plus-2 role was necessary, he said, because settlement was not just about status, but also encompassed economic, social, demilitarization and other issues. Sova underscored several times that Moldova would not accept any separate settlement outside of 5-plus-2.

Some Bones of Contention on Status

15. (C) Sova noted that Russia appeared to have a clearer position with respect to a Transnistria settlement. He said that Lavrov was now speaking about a framework for legal relations between two entities. Sova was pleased that the Russians had incorporated "legal" into their concept, as Sova had been talking about the idea of a special legal status for Transnistria. However, Sova also expressed concern that Russia seemed to think that Moldova would not be able to preserve its unitary status. Another sticking point in Sova's mind was that Russia believed a settlement would be achieved through an accord between Chisinau and Tiraspol, whereas the GOM believed it had to be provided for in a law adopted by the Moldovan parliament.

16. (C) Sova noted what seemed to be a positive change, in that Russia now supported a settlement which respected Moldova territorial integrity. However, he cautioned, it was still necessary to understand what was meant by the term -- whether it meant only the integrity of the external border, with a failed state inside, or whether this territorial integrity would lead to a viable, functional unified state inside that border. Merely preserving territorial integrity was not enough, said Sova, Moldova needed more. Sova cited the example of Serbia and Montenegro which used to be within one international border, but under no circumstances would Moldova accept such a mode of settlement.

Differences on Demilitarization

17. (C) The Lavrov-Voronin meeting also revealed differences in their views on demilitarization. Sova said that the President mentioned the idea of moving a few steps forward in demilitarization before a political settlement, but was not able to convince Lavrov, who believed that demilitarization should follow a political settlement. Sova hypothesized that such a Russian position might be explained by ongoing negotiations with the U.S. on an adapted CFE. Sova said the Moldovans would continue to press to have demilitarization discussed in the 2-plus-1 talks.

CFE Talks Need to Resolve Russian Military Presence

18. (C) Sova said that the Moldovan President would not accept any form of Russian military presence in Transnistria. Transnistria was part of Moldova, he argued, and the continued presence of Russian troops would violate Moldova's neutrality. However, noted Sova, many issues such as discussions of peacekeeping forces did not depend upon Moldova, but depended upon U.S.-Russian CFE discussions. "It is a question of what you agree upon with Russia and what you will insist that we accept," he told the Ambassador. Moldova does not want to allow any foreign troops on its territory, and this includes the peacekeeping troops. Additionally, Sova expressed his concerns about the presence of the "so-called" Transnistrian army. He suggested that everyone knew who served in this army and who owned the armaments this force used, and thus the issue of the Transnistrian army also needed to be resolved. Moldova would not forget the lessons of 2003 (Kozak Memorandum).

Smirnov's Recent Outbursts

19. (C) According to Sova, President Voronin had drawn attention to the fact that, following Smirnov's recent visit to Moscow, the Transnistrian leader had made a number of "unpleasant statements." Lavrov had responded by noting that though Russia had certain influence on him, Smirnov sometimes delivered surprises. Sova speculated that Smirnov would not have announced a ban on travel for EU and U.S. government officials without Russia's consent and support. Sova suggested that Smirnov might make a show of creating difficulties until after the elections but then would relax.

Russia Will Not Interfere in Elections

¶10. (C) Sova noted that Lavrov had begun his meeting with Voronin by asking for the President's assessment of Moldova's upcoming elections. Sova reaffirmed the Moldovan desire to avoid a repeat of what happened in 2005 (when Russia had openly supported the opposition coalition) and said that Moldova wanted to ensure that there would be no direct intervention by any foreign powers. Lavrov had assured Voronin that the Russians had no intention of being involved in the Moldovan campaign in any way. Sova confirmed that thus far there was no indication of any Russian interference in the elections process. Sova reported that Lavrov had suggested that the PCRM had good chances of winning, and thus would likely continue to be the party involved in Transnistria discussions. President Voronin had noted that it was the goal of the ruling party to preserve political stability and said that it was important that no one from abroad (including both Russia and the EU) support any political party.

Comment

¶11. (C) It appears that the Moldovans were satisfied with the Lavrov visit. While the Moldovan leadership is still very wary about its experience with Russia and the Kozak Memorandum in 2003, Sova's comments indicated an emerging readiness to cooperate with Russia to enhance the prospects for resolving Transnistria's status. Moldova is looking to make progress in the 2-plus-1 format but understands that the overall settlement cannot be reached without 5-plus-2. Moldova is proceeding cautiously in its interactions with the Russian bear, and will try to use any 2-plus-1 consultations to engage the 5-plus-2 actors to tackle the status issue. For the first time, the Moldovans seem to think that they can get something positive done in 2-plus-1. While Voronin failed to produce a settlement in time for the elections, he may feel that progress in 2-plus-1 could bring an electoral boost to the PCRM. The Russians, meanwhile, may calculate that Voronin is feeling vulnerable and see this as an opportune moment to press for advantage on their terms.

¶12. (C) As Lavrov's visit coincided with the electoral campaign it can only be interpreted as a modicum of support for Voronin. In the heat of Russia's anger following the failure of the Kozak memorandum, Moscow had used the 2005 elections to campaign against Voronin and his PCRM. Lavrov's visit now signaled a clear end to the Kozak period, pressing the restart button on Moldova's prospects for working with Russia on a Transnistria settlement. Some opposition leaders have charged that Lavrov's visit would help boost PCRM ratings in the elections, but it is not clear that warmer relations with Russia would be a way for the PCRM to win over the Moldovan electorate.

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